

The Doctrine of Sanctification 13. Its Procurer (CONTINUED)

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Transcript

The Doctrine of Sanctification

13. Its Procurer

(CONTINUED)

It has been pointed out in the earlier chapters of this book that the Scriptures present the believer's sanctification from several distinct points of view, the chief of which are, first, our sanctification in the eternal purpose of God, when in His decree He chose us in Christ "that we should be holy and without blame before Him" (Eph. 1:4). That is what is referred to at the beginning of Hebrews 10:10, "by the which will we are sanctified." This is our sanctification by God the Father (Jude 1), which was considered by us in the 11th chapter under "The Author of our Sanctification." Second, there is the fulfilling of that "will" of God, the accomplishing of His eternal purpose by our actual sanctification through the sacrifice of Christ. That is what is referred to in "Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate" (Heb. 13:12). This is our sanctification by God the Son, and is what we are now considering. Third, there is the application of this sanctification to the individual by the Holy Spirit, when He separates him from those who are dead in sins by quickening him, and by the new birth imparting to him a new nature. This is our sanctification by God the Spirit. Fourth, there is the fruit of these in the Christian's character and conduct whereby he is separated in his life and walk from the world which lieth in the Wicked one, and this is by the Holy Spirit's working in him and applying the Word to him, so that he is (in measure—for now we see "through a glass darkly") enabled to apprehend by faith his separation to God by the precious blood of Christ. Yet both his inward and outward life is far from being perfect, for though possessing anew and spiritual nature, the flesh remains in him, unchanged, to the end of his earthly pilgrimage. Those around him know little or nothing of the inward conflict of which he is the subject: they see his outward failures, but hear not his secret groanings before God. It is not yet made manifest what he shall be, but though very imperfect at present through indwelling sin, yet the promise is sure "when He shall appear we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is." Now though in this fourth sense our practical sanctification is incomplete, this in nowise alters the fact, nor to the slightest degree invalidates it, that our sanctification in the first three senses mentioned above is entire and eternal, that "by one offering Christ hath perfected forever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14). Though these three phases of the believer's sanctification are quite distinct as to their development or manifestation, yet they are blessedly combined together, and form our one complete acceptance before God. That which we are here

considering has to do with the objective side of our subject: by which we mean that it is something entirely outside of ourselves, resulting from what Christ has done for us. It is that which we have in Christ and by Christ, and therefore it can be received and enjoyed by faith alone. O what a difference it makes to the peace and joy of the soul once the child of God firmly grasps the blessed truth that a perfect sanctification is his present and inalienable portion, that God has made Christ to be unto him sanctification as well as righteousness. Every real Christian has already been sanctified or set apart as holy unto God by the precious blood of the Lamb. But though many believers are consciously and confessedly "justified by His blood" (Rom. 5:9), yet not a few of them are unwittingly dishonoring that blood by striving (in their desires after holiness of life) to offer God "entire consecration" or "full surrender" (as they call it) in order to get sanctified—so much "living sacrifice" they present to God for so much sanctification. They have been beguiled into the attempt to lay self on some imaginary "altar" so that their sinful nature might be "consumed by the fire of the Spirit." Alas, they neither enter into God's estimate of Christ's blood, nor will they accept the fact that "the heart is deceitful above all things and incurably wicked" (Jer. 17:9). They neither realize that God has "made Christ to be sanctification unto them" nor that "the carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7). It is greatly to be regretted that many theologians have confined their views far too exclusively to the legal aspect of the atonement, whereas both the Old Testament types and the New Testament testimony, with equal clearness, exhibit its efficacy in all our relations to God. Because we are in Christ, all that He is for us must be ours. "The blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin, and the believer does not more truly take his place in Christ before the justice of God as one against whom there is no charge, than he takes his place in Christ before the holiness of God as one upon whom there is no stain" (Jas. Inglis in "Way-marks in the wilderness," to whom we are indebted for much in this and the preceding chapter). Not only is the believer "justified by His blood" (Rom 5:9), but we are "sanctified (set apart, consecrated unto God, fitted and adorned for His presence) through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10). It is this blessed aspect of sanctification which the denominational creeds and the writings of the Puritans almost totally ignored. In the Larger Catechism of the Westminster Assembly the question is asked, "What is sanctification?" To which the following answer is returned: "Sanctification is a work of God's grace, whereby, they whom God hath before the foundation of the world chosen to be holy, are in time through the powerful operation of His Spirit, applying the death and resurrection of Christ unto them, renewed in their whole man after the image of God; having the seeds of repentance unto life and all other saving graces, put into their hearts, and those graces so stirred up, increased, and strengthened, as that they more and more die unto sin and rise unto newness of life." Now far be it from us to sit in judgment upon such an excellent and helpful production as this Catechism, which God has richly blest to thousands of His people, or that we should make any harsh criticisms against men whose shoes we are certainly not worthy to unloose. Nevertheless, we are assured that were its compilers on earth today, they would be the last of all to lay claim to any infallibility, nor do we believe they would offer any objection against their statements being brought to the bar of Holy Scripture. The best of men are but men at the best, and therefore we must call no man "Father." A deep veneration for servants of God and a high regard for their spiritual learning must not deter us from complying with "Prove all things: hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21). The Bereans were commended for testing the teachings even of the apostle Paul, "And searched the Scriptures daily whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11). It is in this spirit that we beg to offer two observations on the above quotation. First, the definition or description of sanctification of the Westminster divines is altogether inadequate, for it entirely omits the most important aspect and fundamental element in the believer's sanctification: it says nothing about our sanctification by Christ (Heb. 10:10; 13:12), but confines itself to the work of the Spirit, which is founded upon that of the Son. This is truly a serious loss, and affords another illustration that God has not granted

light on all His Word to any one man or body of men. A fuller and better answer to the question of, "What is sanctification?" would be, "Sanctification is, first, that act of God whereby He set the elect apart in Christ before the foundation of the world that they should be holy. Second, it is that perfect holiness which the Church has in Christ and that excellent purity which she has before God by virtue of Christ's cleansing blood. Third, it is that work of God's Spirit which, by His quickening operation, sets them apart from those who are dead in sins, conveying to them a holy life or nature, etc." Thus we cannot but regard this particular definition of the Larger Catechism as being defective, for it commences at the middle, instead of starting at the beginning. Instead of placing before the believer that complete and perfect sanctification which God has made Christ to be unto him, it occupies him with the incomplete and progressive work of the Spirit. Instead of moving the Christian to look away from himself with all his sinful failures, unto Christ in whom he is "complete" (Col. 2:10), it encouraged him to look within, where he will often search in vain for the fine gold of the new creation amid all the dross and mire of the old creation. This is to leave him without the joyous assurance of knowing that he has been "perfected forever" by the one offering of Christ (Heb. 10:14); and if he be destitute of that, then doubts and fears must constantly assail him, and the full assurance of faith elude every striving after it. Our second observation upon this definition is, that its wording is faulty and misleading. Let the young believer be credibly assured that he will "more and more die unto sin and rise unto newness of life," and what will be the inevitable outcome? As he proceeds on his way, the Devil assailing him more and more fiercely, the inward conflict between the flesh and the Spirit becoming more and more distressing, increasing light from God's Word more and more exposing his sinful failures, until the cry is forced from him, "I am vile; O wretched man that I am," what conclusion must he draw? Why this: if the Catechism-definition be correct then I was sadly mistaken, I have never been sanctified at all. So far from the "more and more die unto sin" agreeing with his experience, he discovers that sin is more active within and that he is more alive to sin now, than he was ten years ago! Will any venture to gainsay what we have just pointed out above, then we would ask the most mature and godly reader, Dare you solemnly affirm, as in the presence of God, that you have "more and more died unto sin?" If you answer, Yes, the writer for one would not believe you. But we do not believe for a moment that you would utter such an untruth. Rather do we think we can hear you saying, "Such has been my deep desire, such has been my sincere design in using the means of grace, such is still my daily prayer; but alas, alas! I find as truly and as frequently today as I ever did in the past that, "When I would do good, evil is present with me; for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I" (Rom. 7). Ah, there is a vast difference between what ought to be, and that which actually obtains in our experience. That we may not be charged with partiality, we quote from the "Confession of Faith" adopted by the Baptist Association, which met in Philadelphia 1742, giving the first two sections of their brief chapter on sanctification: 1. "They who are united to Christ, effectually called, and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit in them through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, are also (a) farther sanctified, really and personally, through the same virtue, (b) by His Word and Spirit dwelling in them; (c) the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, (d) and the several lusts thereof more and more weakened and mortified, and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of all true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. 2. This sanctification is throughout in the whole man, yet imperfect in this life; there abideth still some remnants of corruption in every part, whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war."—Italics ours. Like the previous one, this description of sanctification by the Baptists leaves something to be desired, for it makes no clear and direct statement upon the all-important and flawless holiness which every believer has in Christ, and that spotless and impeccable purity which is upon him by God's imputation of the cleansing efficacy of His Son's sacrifice. Such a serious omission is too vital for us to ignore. In the second place, the words which we have placed in italics

not only perpetuate the faulty wording of the Westminster Catechism but also convey a misleading conception of the present condition of the Christian. To speak of "some remnants of corruption" still remaining in the believer, necessarily implies that by far the greater part of his original corruption has been removed, and that only a trifling portion of the same now remains. But something vastly different from that is what every true Christian discovers to his daily grief and humiliation. Contrast, dear reader, with the "some remnants of corruption" remaining in the Christian (an expression frequently found in the writings of the Puritans) the honest confession of the heavenly-minded Jonathan Edwards: "When I look into my heart and take a view of its wickedness, it looks like an abyss infinitely deeper than Hell. And it appears to me that, were it not for free grace, exalted and raised up to the infinite height of all the fulness of the great Jehovah, and the arm of His grace stretched forth in all the majesty of His power and in all the glory of His sovereignty, I should appear sunk down in my sins below Hell itself. It is affecting to think how ignorant I was when a young Christian, of the bottomless depths of wickedness, pride, hypocrisy, and filth left in my heart." The closer we walk with God, the more conscious will we be of our utter depravity. Among the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England (Episcopalian) there is none treating of the important doctrine of sanctification! We believe that all the Reformation "standards" (creeds, confessions, and catechisms) will be searched in vain for any clear statement upon the perfect holiness which the Church has in Christ or of God's making Him to be, imputatively, sanctification unto His people. In consequence of this, most theological systems have taught that while justification is accomplished the moment the sinner truly believes in Christ, yet is his sanctification only then begun, and is a protracted process to be carried on throughout the remainder of this life by means of the Word and ordinances, seconded by the discipline of trial and affliction. But if this be the case, then there must be a time in the history of every believer when he is "justified from all things" and yet unfit to appear in the presence of God; and before he can appear there, the process must be completed—he must attain what is called "entire sanctification" and be able to say "I have no sin," which, according to 1 John 1:8, would be the proof of self-deception. Here, then, is a real dilemma. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves; and yet, according to the doctrine of "progressive sanctification," until we can say it (though it be inarticulately in the moment of death) we are not meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. What an awful thought it is, that Christ may come any hour to those who realize that the process of sanctification within them is incomplete. But more: not only are those who have no complete sanctification unfit for eternal glory, but it would be daring presumption for them to boldly enter the Holiest now—the "new and living way" is not yet available for them, they cannot draw near "with a true heart in full assurance of faith." What wonder, then, that those who believe this doctrine are plunged into perplexity, that such a cloud rests over their acceptance with God. But thank God, many triumph over their creed: their hearts are better than their heads, otherwise their communion with God and their approach to the throne of His grace would be impossible. Now in blessed contrast from this inadequate doctrine of theology, the glorious Gospel of God reveals to us a perfect Saviour. It exhibits One who has not only made complete satisfaction to the righteous Ruler and Judge, providing for His people a perfect righteousness before Him, but whose sacrifice has also fitted us to worship and serve a holy God acceptably, and to approach the Father with full confidence and filial love. A knowledge of the truth of justification is not sufficient to thus assure the heart: there must be something more than a realization that the curse of the law is removed—if the conscience be still defiled, if the eye of God rests upon us as unpurged and unclean, then confidence before Him is impossible, for we feel utterly unfit for His ineffable presence. But forever blessed be His name, the precious Gospel of God announces that the blood of Christ meets this exigency also. "Now where remission of these (sins) is, there is no more offering for sin. Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus" (Heb. 10:18, 19). The same sacrifice which has procured the remission of our sins, provides the right for us to draw

nigh unto God as acceptable worshippers. "By His own blood He entered in once into the Holy Place, having obtained eternal redemption for us" (Heb. 9:13). Now that which gives the One who took our place the right to enter Heaven itself, also gives us the right to take the same place. That which entitled Christ to enter Heaven was "His own blood," and that which entitles the feeblest believer to approach the very throne of God "with boldness," is "the blood of Jesus." Our title to enter Heaven now, in spirit, is precisely the same as Christ's was! The same precious blood which appeased the wrath of God, covers every stain of sin's guilt and defilement; and not only so, but in the very place of that which it covers and cleanses, it leaves its own excellency; so that because of its finite purity and merit, the Christian is regarded not only as guiltless and unreprouable, but also as spotless and holy. Oh to realize by faith that we are assured of the same welcome by God now as His beloved Son received when He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. God views us in Christ His "Holy One," as possessing a holiness as perfect as is the righteousness in which we are accepted, both of them being as perfect as Christ Himself. "In us, as we present ourselves before Him through Christ, God sees no sin! He looks on us in the face of His Anointed, and there He sees us purer than the heavens" (Alex. Carson).

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